

Local initiative earns national recognition

Students and Refugees Together (START) is a social care initiative and registered charity created in 2001 by University of Plymouth Associate Professor of Social Work, Avril Bellinger.

As part of the Plymouth Asylum Seeker and Refugee Consortium, START works with families, individuals and institutions to help refugees in the city reach their potential and make a positive contribution to the communities where they settle.

Students from a variety of fields including social work, occupational therapy, geography and community development provide START with the time and energy to support refugees to access their rights as they move into new communities and different locations.

START provides an individually-tailored casebook service, co-ordinates community activities that reduce social isolation, promotes healthy living and provides opportunities for volunteering. At the same time, the students benefit from challenging and powerful learning experiences that equip them to work nationally and internationally.

Since it began, more than 150 students have participated in START and the programme has attracted interest from all around the world.

Most recently, START has achieved national recognition for service delivery and best practice from the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), funded by the Department of Health.

SCIE was set up to identify and disseminate the knowledge that drives good practice in all aspects of social care throughout the UK in order that services can be improved and the status of the social care workforce raised. Only 12 schemes nationwide received this SCIE accolade and START is the only programme of its kind in the South West region.

Professor Bellinger said:

Recognition by the SCIE is very important to us because it validates the unique approach we have taken to involving students in the help and support of asylum seekers and refugees in and around Plymouth.

Her aim now is to build on this success. She added:

"I want to grow the impact and reputation of START by working with the Students in Free Enterprise project and continuing to spread the word about the initiative around the world."

START student volunteers with some of the refugees they have helped

